

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (currently amended) For use in a conferencing system incorporating noise characteristic estimation of a first of two bidirectionally transmitted signals, the improvement comprising detecting at least one of voice activity and in-band tone activity in a signal transmitted in a first direction opposite to said first signal and in response ceasing said noise characteristic estimation and

further comprising detecting at least one of voice activity and in-band tone activity in said first signal and in response ceasing said noise characteristic estimation in a direction of said first signal.

2. (canceled)

3. (currently amended) The improvement of claim 2 1, wherein said noise characteristic is noise level.

4. (original) The improvement of claim 1, wherein said noise characteristic is noise level.

5.- 6. (canceled)

7. (previously presented) Apparatus for controlling noise characteristic estimation in a conferencing system, comprising:

a first noise characteristic estimator for estimating a noise characteristic of a signal of interest transmitted in a first direction through said conferencing system;

a first voice activity detector for detecting at least one of voice activity and in-band tone activity in a signal transmitted through said conferencing system in a direction opposite to said signal of interest and in response disabling the first noise characteristic estimator;

a second noise characteristic estimator for estimating a noise characteristic of a signal

of interest transmitted in a direction opposite to said first direction, through said conferencing system; and

a second voice activity detector for detecting at least one of voice activity and in-band tone activity in a signal transmitted through said conferencing system in said first direction and in response disabling the second noise characteristic estimator.

8. (canceled)

9. (original) The apparatus of claim 7, wherein said noise characteristic is noise level.

10. - 12. (canceled)

13. (previously presented) A conferencing system, comprising:  
a line input for receiving a line-in audio signal from an audio signal line;  
a line output for transmitting a line-out audio signal to said audio line;  
a speaker connected to said line input for broadcasting said line-in audio signal;  
a microphone connected to said line output for applying said line-out audio signal to said line output;

an echo canceller connected to said line input and said line output for canceling echo signals of said line-in audio signal appearing in said line-out audio signal;

at least two noise level estimators, one of said noise level estimators for estimating noise level in said line-in audio signal and the other of said noise level estimators for estimating noise level in said line-out audio signal; and

at least two voice activity detectors, one of said voice activity detectors for detecting voice activity in said line-in audio signal and in response disabling said other of said noise level estimators, and the other of said voice activity detectors for detecting voice activity in said line-out audio signal and in response disabling said one of said noise level estimators.

14. (canceled)

15. (previously presented) The conferencing system of claim 13, wherein said other of said voice activity detectors is connected to said line-output and said echo canceller, and said one of said voice activity detectors is connected to said line input.

16. (canceled)

17. (previously presented) The conferencing system of claim 13, wherein said other of said voice activity detectors is connected to said microphone and said echo canceller.

18. (canceled)